
Recovery From Bible Abuse

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Fear of the Bible has led many Gays and Lesbians to abandon the basic book about Jesus and the message of the good news of God's love in Christ.

Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper helped to begin Exodus International, a religious therapy ministry that aimed to "cure" homosexuals of their sin and sickness of homosexuality.

After about five years of promoting the ex-gay movement and counseling hundreds of Lesbians and Gays to change their sexual orientation, Michael and Gary realized that they were hurting and not helping people. They saw many clients become depressed and even attempt suicide because they could not change. Some went as far as to mutilate themselves physically in frustration.

Michael and Gary also realized that they were gay when they fell in love with each other! They dropped out of church completely. They put their Bibles in a box and sealed the box with tape for fear that something evil would attack them if they opened a Bible again. They went through years of intense Bible-Phobia.

Finally, Michael and Gary realized that God loved them just as they were. They began the slow but steady recovery from Bible and religious abuse. They began to tell their story of recovery in Christ and their joy and celebration of their lives as Gay Christians. They were interviewed on national television.

A movie, "ONE NATION UNDER GOD," was released about their experiences. Gary died of AIDS in September 1991. Michael

continues to share his faith in Christ and help others to recover from religious oppression. For Michael and Gary, Bible abuse and recovery received a great deal of public attention, while most of us suffer alone, and in silence. Yet the pain and fear

of multitudes of other Gays and Lesbians who are tormented by religious oppression are just as real and cries out for love, acceptance and freedom.



BIBLE ABUSE IN THE OPPRESSION OF MINORITIES

The Bible has been used for centuries to control and injure misunderstood and oppressed minorities:

The Nazis used the Bible to justify the holocaust of pain, destruction and death against Jews, homosexuals, gypsies and many others during World War II.

Slave merchants and owners used the Bible to justify and maintain slavery in the United States up to and beyond President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Racial segregation was and still is defended and preached by many ignorant Bible abusers.

The history of Bible abuse against oppressed people has come to climactic expression in the outpouring of fear, hate, alienation, rejection and torment of homosexuals by millions of otherwise loving and caring church people.

The result of this evil abuse of Scripture has been to deny to millions of suffering people the love and comfort of God in Jesus Christ at the very time that same-sex committed relationships, love, compassion, self-esteem, courage and hope are most needed during the AIDS epidemic.

THE CHALLENGE OF AIDS

Churches and church leaders will some day have to answer to God for using God's Word as a weapon to discourage, judge and condemn Gays and Lesbians at the time when the good news of Jesus Christ is most wanted and needed in homosexual culture.

For Christian churches to claim that AIDS is God's punishment on gay men for being homosexual ignores that face that no biblical, scientific or reasonable evidence exists to support such a claim.

How did the Bible become so twisted in the hands of Bible "experts" and preachers that it has become a weapon for destruction and pain to be used against the people most in need of compassion and hope? Where did Bible study jump off the track?

JESUS GIVES ANSWERS

The answer is that Bible study not centered in Jesus Christ and guided by the Spirit of Jesus is doomed to come up with the wrong answers.

Jesus delivered a knockout punch to the claim that sickness is a direct result of sin. When the disciples asked Jesus to decide who committed the sin (the man or his parents, that the man should be born blind), Jesus said that nobody was to blame and that the blindness gave a perfect opportunity to show God's love and power (**John 9:1-7**).

Many parallels to the way the churches have treated people with AIDS can be seen in John 9.

Religious leaders showed themselves to be prejudiced, insensitive, judgmental and oppressive.

Parents were afraid of the power of established religion and turned against their own child.

Religious leaders refused to believe the

clear evidence of God's love and power.

The once-blind man tried to convince the religious authorities that his own experience of God's love and power was real. The outcast and rejected man was accepted and welcomed by Jesus.

The relevance of the actions and teachings of Jesus in John 9 to the current AIDS crisis is obvious.

THE SIX BIBLE VERSES

Lesbians and Gays have been condemned and rejected as evil by incorrect translations and wrong applications of only six verses in the Bible:

Genesis 19:5

Leviticus 18:22

Leviticus 20:13

Romans 1:27

I Corinthians 6:9

I Timothy 1:10

The Bible was never intended as a weapon to teach rejection and hate for oppressed and wounded people. This can be shown by using the best biblical scholarship available to explain and clarify the true meaning and purpose of these six verses.

SEX AND MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE

None of the culture of the Bible is exactly like ours.

In the Old Testament, every person was expected to marry and produce children. Biblical Hebrew contains no word for bachelor! A man's life continued after death through his children. A woman's value was based primarily on her ability to have children. Women were the property of men.

Romantic love was not related to the marriage contract. Men with power had as many women and as much sex as they wanted. The Bible never discussed the intimate details of private sexual practices, whether gay or straight.

These are just a few of the biblical views that are totally different from the way we see things today. Become familiar with the cultural setting of the Bible.

Use *The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible*, published by Abingdon in four volumes and a supplement, to learn about Bible customs of marriage, sex, family, etc. It is the best source I know for detailed, accurate information.

SODOM AND SODOMY: Genesis 19:5

"SODOMY" is not a biblical word. State laws against sodomy not only violate the Constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state; they also use an incorrect and wrongly translated term for the laws!

A "Sodomite" in the Bible is simply a person who lives in Sodom, which included Lot and his family. The term "sodomite" in the King James version of **Deuteronomy 23:17** and **1 Kings 14:24** is the incorrect rendering of the Hebrew for "temple prostitute."

The average person assumes that the Bible clearly condemns male to male sexual intercourse as "sodomy" and that the city of Sodom was destroyed because homosexuality is the worst possible sin in the Bible. **These assumptions are based on no evidence at all in the Bible itself.**

No Jewish scholars taught that the sin of Sodom was sexual until after the first Christian century. None of the biblical references to Sodom in the Old or New Testaments mention sexual sins of any kind but, rather, view Sodom either as an example of injustice, lack of hospitality to strangers, idolatry, or as an example of desolation and destruction.

See Deuteronomy 29:22-28; 32:32; Ezekiel 16:49-50; Jeremiah 49:18; 50:41; Isaiah 13:19-22 and Matthew 10:14-15. In Jude 7, the term "strange flesh" is *hetero sarkos* ("different flesh, meat") and refers to foreign gods or people and cannot refer to *homo* ("the same") flesh. This word for "flesh" is never used in the New Testament as a word for "sex."

The key verse is Genesis 19:5, where all of the people of Sodom surrounded Lot's house where the strangers were staying and

demanded that Lot "Bring them out to us that we may know them." That's it. That is all that the verse says!

The word "know" is Hebrew *yada*. It is used 943 times in the Old Testament to "know" God, good and evil, the truth, the law, people, places, things, etc. It is a very flexible word, as are many Hebrew words. It probably means in Genesis 19:5 that the people of Sodom were afraid of the strangers that Lot (himself a resident alien) had brought into his house for protection.

The people said, "Bring them out so we can know who they are." Violent intentions by the people of Sodom were clearly implied by Lot's response. If the men of Sodom were homosexuals, why did Lot offer to give them his daughters?

Lot's offer of his young daughters to be used in whatever way the people wanted is far more reprehensible to me than any problem of sexual orientation could possibly be!

These hostile and violent people were heterosexual, and homosexual orientation had nothing to do with the incident.

Most modern translations alter the text of Genesis 19:5 to suite the homophobic prejudice of the translators or publishers. The New American Standard Bible translates "know" as "have relations" and gives a marginal note "have intercourse." The Good News Bible goes so far as to add a sentence to the text: "The men of Sodom wanted to have sex with them."

Such tampering with the biblical text is so obviously prejudiced and outrageously unscientific that the only reasonable explanation is that scholars and publisher alike are willing to compromise their academic integrity to sustain the lie that the Bible condemns same-sex sexual orientation as a horrible abomination to God!

The King James version, unaffected by modern homophobic frenzy in Bible translations, translated the word "know" as "know." The New Revised Standard Version, 1989, also translates *yada* as "know."

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT SODOM?

Genesis 19 and the full story of Lot and the city of Sodom are important in the ongoing saga of Abraham, God's promises, and the beginnings of the nation as the people of God. The story does not, however, deal at all with sexual orientation and therefore has no bearing at all on the issue of God's acceptance or rejection of Gays and Lesbians.

To twist the story to say what it does not say is to miss what it DOES say. The story of Sodom clearly teaches that evil and violent people who attack aliens and strangers whom they do not know and do not understand, simply because they are different and not known ("in the closet"), deserve and get God's quick and terrible judgement and punishment!

The purpose of the story of Sodom is to show that the misunderstood, strange, different minorities in any community are in danger from violence by the majority when that majority is ungodly and selfish.

The real message of the story of Sodom is the opposite of what homophobic preachers have made it out to be. The homosexual minority in our society today is more like the guests in Lot's house who were protected behind closed doors than to the mindless mob that, out of fear, ignorance and hatred, wanted to expose, humiliate and destroy the people that they did not "know."

It is time to set the record straight! Genesis 19 is about fear and hate of a mob directed against a small group of isolated strangers in their midst. Sexual orientation is not the issue here or anywhere else in the Bible.

Read also the strange story in Judges 19:1-30 of the Levite in Gibeah, which was patterned after the story of Lot and the angels in Genesis 19. Jewish teachers before the time of Christ never interpreted either of these stories as having any connection with homosexuality or sexual orientation. Neither should we.

ABOMINATION:

Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13

One Sunday evening when I was giving a Bible study on "The Bible as Friend of Lesbians and Gays" at Atlanta First MCC, a man walked into the back door of the church and shouted in a loud voice, "What about Leviticus?" He left immediately. A deacon from the church followed him and told him that if he did that again he would be arrested, since it is a felony to interrupt a religious service in the state of Georgia.

The man did not return. But he had made his point: **What about Leviticus?**

Two verses in Leviticus say the same thing. Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13 both call the ritual act of sex between two men "an abomination." These statements are part of a long list of *baal* religious rituals that were condemned as idolatry in what is commonly called "the holiness code." Sex practices in *baal* rituals were viewed as "sympathetic magic" to influence the spirits or gods (*baal*) who were believed to control the fertility of flocks and crops.

The two verses have nothing at all to do with homosexual sexual orientation. They are addressed to heterosexuals who defied God by turning to *baal* fertility religion to insure good crops and healthy flocks.

Since the economy of the people was based on the fertility of land and animals, the people were frequently drawn into the variety of Canaanite sexual rituals of worship in honor of *baal*. God's prophets then called the people to repent and turn back to God. The cycle of repentance from idolatry and lapse into *baalism* is repeated over and over in the Old Testament.

WHAT IS AN ABOMINATION?

The term "abomination" in Leviticus was always ascribed to idolatrous practices that were forbidden as a rejection of God. This is why the death penalty was imposed on those who committed the many "abominations" listed in Leviticus 18 and 20. Even cursing parents was punished by death (20:9)! Read all of Leviticus 18 and 20. Sexual orientation was never a Bible issue and was never discussed, even by implication.

When Jesus quoted from Leviticus, the only reference that he used was Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." See Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14.

It is ironic, isn't it, that Jesus used Leviticus to teach love and modern preachers misuse Leviticus to teach hate!

In Proverbs 6:16, the word "abomination" was used for a list of attitudes and actions that sound like the evils of homophobia:

"There are six things which God hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to God: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among friends."

UNEXPECTED SUPPORT

When I was on a radio talk show in March 1993, in Eugene Oregon, I gave the above explanation of the two verses in Leviticus. A caller said, "I am Jewish, and my son just had his bar mitzvah. He had to read the passage you just explained from Leviticus when it was his turn to read in the synagogue. My rabbi gave the same explanation that you gave. I just wanted to tell you that it is good to hear a Christian telling the truth about the Bible for a change!"

CHECK OUT THE INCONSISTENT TRANSLATIONS

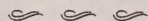
1. Go to a library. Look through the various Bible versions and write down the many different translations of Genesis 19:5 and Leviticus 18:20; 20:13. If you are sharing this study in a group, encourage members of the group to bring the different translations and compare them.

Note how many words and ideas have been added that are not in the original Hebrew - especially in paraphrase editions like The Living Bible and The Amplified Bible.

2. Read Genesis 19, Judges 19 and Genesis 38 to gain an overview of Old Testament attitudes about sex. Make a list of the attitudes and assumptions about women, sex, family values, oppression of the weak, male dominance, etc., that are shown in these three chapters.

3. Read all of Leviticus chapters 18, 19 and 20 to see the context of the passages that are incorrectly used against Lesbians and Gays. Why do you think the death penalty was required so frequently? How do you think Jesus would deal with these three chapters?

4. Read again Chapter 10, "Lesbian/Gay Pride Day in Sodom" in *INVITATION TO FREEDOM*.



REDISCOVERING THE TRUTH IN PAUL

Romans 1:26-27

I Corinthians 6:9

I Timothy 1:10

Taking anything that Paul said out of its context is like trying to drive a car blindfolded! You don't know where you are, where you have been, where you are going or who you just ran over and killed!

Paul's writings have been taken out of context to punish and oppress every identifiable minority in the world: Jews, children, blacks, slaves, women, politicians, divorced people, intellectuals, the ignorant, poor people, convicts, pro choice people, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transexuals, religious reformers, the mentally ill, and the list could go on and on.

Saint Augustine of Hippo said that every Christian should memorize the Book of Romans, be able to recite it word for word and spend some time with it every day. In Augustine's best known work, *The Confessions*, Romans was quoted frequently throughout. In the time of Jesus, all scholars and students did their study from memory. A student of a rabbi had to memorize the

Old Testament and all of the official interpretations. This guaranteed accuracy and credibility as well as ensuring that the context would be considered in every use.

When I taught a Book Study of Romans at the Baptist College of Charleston South Carolina, I decided to memorize Romans as Augustine suggested. I nearly drove some of my friends crazy having them follow me in the Bible while I recited the verses I had memorized!

But the effort paid off. Being able to visualize the message of Romans as a whole immediately cleared up a lot of Paul's thought that I had not been able to untangle before by traditional means of study. It helped so much that I continued memorizing the books of the Bible that I taught in college courses.

Paul's use of Greek was quite precise, but one sentence could go on for more than a full page of text. Paul also had a variety of partners who helped him write his letters. For a lot of reasons, Paul frequently is difficult to understand, as II Peter 3:16-18 pointed out in warning against distorting Scripture.

WHAT PAUL SAID IN ROMANS 1:26-27

The context of Romans 1:26-27 is Paul's long discourse to show that all people equally need Jesus Christ and that the gospel of which he was proud was "The power of God for salvation for ALL who believe" (1:16).

Paul showed that all people equally need Jesus and that all people can have Jesus. Paul's gospel is all-inclusive. Galatians 3:28 said it simply: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are ALL ONE in Christ Jesus."

Romans 1:26-27 is Paul's vigorous denunciation of foreign religious worship and rituals. The sexual practices that Paul denounced here are part of his rejection of all forms of idolatry in 1:18--2:4. Paul concluded that all people have violated God's law and need to be saved. Paul also concluded that God's kindness, forbearance

and patience are available to all people.

I am convinced that the only way to grasp what Paul was saying in Romans 1:26-27 is to memorize the first three chapters of Romans and let Paul himself be your teacher about the passage.

Romans 1:26-27 contains some words used only here by Paul. Also, the familiar words are used in unusual ways. The passage is very difficult to translate. We are not sure what some of the words mean. The argument is clearly directed against some form of idolatry that would have been known to Paul's readers. To us, the argument is vague and indirect.

Verse 25 is clearly a denunciation of pagan religion: "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature and not the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." Then follows 1:26-27:

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions: for their women exchanged the natural use for that which is against nature. And in the same way also the men abandoned the natural use of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

After this, Paul gave a list of sins that people commit against each other because of the fear and anger that flow from "a depraved mind."

Paul at no point in his writing dealt with same-sex orientation or the expression of love and affection between two people of the same sex who love each other.

Romans 1:26-27 is an indictment of the many religious cults, temples and rituals that had developed to provide entertaining and erotic experiences for the people.

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, the second largest city in the empire and the crossroads of world trade and culture. Pausanius observed at about the same time as Paul that there were over 1,000 religions in Corinth. The most prominent were the fertility cult of Aphrodite, the worship of

Apollo, and the Delphic Oracle, which was across the bay from Corinth. The Delphic Oracle was the best known religious shrine of prophecy in the ancient world. Women went into a trance and uttered difficult sayings in response to questions. The women prophets were called "python," which was the name of the snake that symbolized the knowledge of secret wisdom given by the god Apollo. The temple of Apollo is the most imposing ruin left on the site of ancient Corinth.

Paul's readers would have been well aware of the religious climate from which he wrote Romans. Romans 1:26-27 was probably a lot clearer to them than it is to us. There is no evidence in the words of the passage to suggest that Paul aimed them at men and women who loved people of the same sex and expressed that romantic love in physical affection and sex.

The word "passions" is the same word used to speak of the suffering and death of Jesus in Acts 1:3 and does not mean what we mean by "passion" today. *Eros*, the Greek word for romantic love, was never used in the New Testament. "Passions" in 1:26 probably refers to the frenzied state of mind that many ancient mystery cults induced in worshippers by means of wine, drugs and music.

The word "burned" in 1:27 is a strange word that Paul does not use elsewhere. It is a different Greek word for "burn" than the one used in I Corinthians 7:9: "It is better to marry than to burn." The meaning of "burn" in 1:27 cannot be derived from Paul's use of the word elsewhere. Another strange use is the term "against nature." Paul used the same term to speak of God's action of including Gentiles in the People of God in Romans 11:21-24.

How can something "contrary to nature" be automatically evil if the same term can be used of the loving and inclusive activity of God in saving all people? See the full treatment of the words of Paul in Boswell's book.

WHAT IS AN INDECENT ACT?

One special word needs to be clarified. "Committing indecent acts" in 1:27 is rendered by KJV as "working that which is unseemly." Phillips goes overboard to render it "shameful horrors!" The word is *askemosunen* in Greek and is formed of the word for outer appearance plus the negative particle. It speaks of the inner or hidden part or parts of the individual which are not ordinarily seen or known in public. "Indecent" in I Corinthians 12:23 refers to the parts of the body that are not seen but are necessary and receive honor.

I Corinthians 13:5 says that love does not behave "indecently." The word was used to translate Deuteronomy 24:1 into Greek to say that a man could divorce his wife if he "found some indecency in her." The religious leaders argued endlessly about what "some indecency" meant. Some said it was anything that displeased the husband. Others were more strict and said it could only refer to adultery. Jesus commented on Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in Matthew 19:1-12 but did not define the term.

Paul was well aware of the variety of ways to interpret the word "indecency," and he used it in a variety of ways himself. To read into "indecent acts" a whole world of homosexual ideas is to abandon the realities of scientific study and embark on useless and damaging speculation that cannot be supported by the meaning of the word or the way Paul used the word elsewhere.

If Paul had intended to condemn homosexuals as the worst of all sinners, he certainly had the language skills to do a clearer job of it than emerges from Romans 1:16-27.

The fact is that Paul nowhere condemned or even mentioned romantic love and sexual relations between people of the same sex who love each other. Paul never commented on sexual orientation. As in the rest of the Bible, Paul nowhere even hinted that Lesbians and Gay men can or should change their sexual orientation.

The use of Romans 1:26-27 against homosexuals turns out to be a blunt instrument to batter and wound with no redemptive qualities and no conclusive edge. The use of Romans 1:26-27 to judge and condemn homosexuals overlooks the great mass of writing from Paul that clearly taught God's freely given and all inclusive love for every person on earth.

God offers through Jesus Christ the free gift of salvation that cannot be earned or bought by human effort or by religious works. Paul summed it up in Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end ("goal") of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

THE HOMOSEXUAL GHOST:

I Corinthians 6:9

I Timothy 1:10

Ghosts may not hurt you, but they can make you hurt yourself! The homosexual ghosts in I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10 were created by the inaccurate and intentionally misleading translation of an obscure and difficult Greek word.

The Bible verse most frequently used to condemn and reject homosexuals is I Corinthians 6:9. It cannot be ignored. A typical modern translation is:

"The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. So do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the realm of God."

Parallel to this is I Timothy 1:9-10:

"Law is not made for a righteous person but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and fornicators and homosexuals and kidnapers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound (healthy) teaching."

These two passages sound very convincing in including lesbians and gay men in the

most dreadful lists of depraved human behavior imaginable. The problem is that the word that is translated "homosexual" does not mean homosexual!

There is no word for homosexual in New Testament Greek. "Homosexual" is a composite word made from one Greek word and one Latin word. It is of modern origin and was not used at all until the 19th century. There is also no word for "homosexual" in Old Testament Hebrew. The word translated "homosexual" is Greek *arsenokoite* and was formed from two words meaning "male" and "bed." The word is not found anywhere else in the New Testament and has not been found anywhere in contemporary Greek of Paul's time. We are not sure what it means. It only appears in these two lists. The word is of obscure origin and uncertain meaning. It probably refers to male prostitutes with female customers, which was a common practice in the Roman world, especially noteworthy in some of the discoveries in the ruins of Pompeii, which was destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79.

When early Greek-speaking Christian preachers condemned homosexuals, they did not use this word. John Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407) preached in Greek against homosexuality, but he never used this word for homosexuals, and when he preached on I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:10, he did not mention homosexuals. See the full discussion of this in John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* - Appendix I, "Lexicography and Saint Paul," pages 335-353.

SOFT DOES NOT MEAN EFFEMINATE!

The word translated "effeminate" in I Corinthians 6:9 is Greek *malakoi* and means "soft" or "vulnerable." It was translated as "soft" in reference to king's clothing in Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25 and as "illness" in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35. It is not used anywhere else in the New Testament and carries no hint of reference to sexual orientation.

The translation of "effeminate" is incorrect, ignorant, degrading to women, and impossible to justify based on ancient usage compared to the meaning of "effeminate" today!

No Bible before the RSV in 1946 translated *arsenokoite* as "homosexuals." Why have modern Bible translators given in to this mistaken use of "homosexual" in the New Testament? Why is this damaging and incorrect translation perpetuated?

The incorrect rendering of *malakoi* and *arsenokoite* as references to gender orientation has been disastrous for millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual people. It has enlisted a mighty army of ignorant religious fanatics against the homosexual people of our world and has turned many Lesbians and Gays against the Bible, which holds for them as for all people the good news of God's love in Christ.

The holocaust of hate and violence against homosexuals and by homosexuals against themselves and each other is the "shameful horror" of this ongoing evil mistake in translation.

How can Bible translators and publishers continue to print lies in the Bible? It is poison, but there is no national panic such as occurred when poisoned medicine was found on store shelves some years ago!

Evil homophobic Bible "translations from hell" must not go unchallenged. The use of these translations by ignorant religious bigots to incite fear and hate against Gay, Lesbian and bisexual people demands a clear, academically sound, credible and easily understood response.

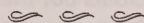
What is given in this study is only a beginning. Every Bible word that has been used to wound, alienate and oppress people must be examined in detail and carefully defused. God calls us to return the Bible to the oppressed and outcast people for whom it was written.

BUILD YOUR OWN CASE FOR TRUTH

1) Find different translations of Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1: 9-

10. Compare the various translations. Notice how many different ways 1 Corinthians 6:9 is translated. Why do you think so many different translations were developed? Study Boswell's explanation of Paul's words in these verses.

2) Do not leave this section until you are confident in your own mind that the Bible gives no basis for condemning and rejecting people based on sexual orientation. Your self esteem and confidence as a Gay or Lesbian Christian and your ability to share your experience of Christ with others depends on your knowing beyond any doubt that the Bible is your friend and not your enemy.



WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

On a national television broadcast of the Oprah Winfrey Show in the spring of 1993, The Rev. Sharna Sutherin was shown preaching at MCC San Francisco.

She said, "I will tell you everything Jesus said about homosexuality." She then looked at the camera and said nothing. In a few moments, the audience got the point and broke into applause!

Jesus never mentioned homosexuality or homosexuals or said anything about sexual orientation. If homosexuality were really the greatest of all sins, surely Jesus would have been careful to deal with it in the Gospels.

Jesus spent his life and ministry telling and showing God's love for all people, especially the rejected, the outcast, the homeless, the sick, the oppressed and those whom religion and society had condemned as sinners. None of the teachings of Jesus reinforces the bigotry and prejudice of church people against homosexuals. I have had phone calls from religious people who told me I am in danger of hell fire because I am gay. These calls are frequently put on answering machines or in letters in which the caller or writer remains anonymous.

Who did Jesus say were really in danger of hell fire? Was it homosexuals? No. It was religious bigots and hate mongers who distorted the message of God to use as a weapon against people they despised as different and inferior.

Jesus' most intense rebukes were against religious leaders who were insensitive, legalistic, judgmental and who blocked others from God's mercy by their own lives: Jesus said in Matthew 23:33, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the judgment of hell?"

All believers are called to reclaim the truth of the gospel as Jesus taught and lived it.

It is not homosexuals but the hateful and angry enemies of homosexuals who are in danger of God's judgment. Let's get the facts correct. Homophobic fundamentalists, read the gospels until you know every word "by heart" and in your heart. Then pay attention to it and do it in the love and power of the Holy Spirit just as Jesus instructed us all.

"They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love; they will know we are Christians by our love!"

CELEBRATION OF LIFE IN A GAY BAR

Several years ago I was invited to lead a service of celebration of life for a popular San Francisco female impersonator who had died. The bar was packed with people for the service on a Sunday afternoon. When I was introduced as pastor of Golden Gate MCC, I said, "I am here to talk with you about Jesus and to tell you that God loves homosexuals."

A gay man whose alcohol level was rising rapidly stood up and said, "God doesn't love homosexuals!" Somebody yelled at the man, "Throw him out!" I said, "No, don't throw him out. Just calm him down!" The man sat down. The service went on.

I made my remarks very brief: "The Bible says that God so loved the world that God gave Jesus to us so that whosoever believes in Jesus will not perish but will have eternal life. If God loves the world, God does love

homosexuals, because we really are everywhere!"

At this point, some of the patrons applauded and cheered. The outburst by the man at the beginning actually had made the rest of the crowd more sympathetic and open to what I said.

God was present in that service. I added that God loves you and wants you to love yourself and each other. Later, several people later expressed their faith in Jesus as they paid tribute to their friend who had died of AIDS.

When millions of people have been carefully conditioned by the traditional churches to believe that God does not love them and that they are hopeless as homosexuals, which they cannot change, then the mission of Gay and Lesbian Christians is clear.

Go! Tell the good news of Jesus! Live and teach the love of Jesus for all people. Get involved! Be where the most wounded, alienated and oppressed people of our society are to be found: the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual world.

Many churches have made it clear: "NO HOMOSEXUALS HERE." Jesus, however, puts out the welcome mat and says to all people alienated and oppressed by religion: "EVERYBODY IS INVITED!"

No Bible material supports fear and hate for Gays and Lesbians. No Bible material condemns homosexual orientation as a sin. No Bible material discusses or tries to regulate the private sex practices of anyone. No Bible material contradicts the love and acceptance by Jesus for all oppressed and outcast people.

The Bible gives the cure for homophobia: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear causes pain, and the one who is afraid is not yet mature in love" (1 John 4:18).

God loves you and wants you to love yourself and others. This love comes into your life when Jesus comes into your life. Jesus frequently greeted people by saying, "Do not be afraid."

The love of Jesus in your heart casts out fear. Being a homosexual is not a sin. Hating homosexuals is.

JESUS CORRECTED BIBLE ABUSE

Jesus said in John 5:39, "Search the Scriptures, for you think that in them you have eternal life; but they bear witness of me." Jesus explained in Luke 24:32-48 "what was written about him in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" and "opened their minds to understand the Bible".

John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld the glory of God in Jesus full of grace and truth". Jesus summed up his teachings in one commandment in John 13:34-35: "Love each other just as I love you".

Jesus is God's answer to Bible abuse and is our greatest weapon against the religious oppression of homosexuals. The Christian call to victory over homophobia is the call to come to Jesus Christ and center our lives and our mission in the One who proved God's inclusive love in His life, death and resurrection.

In the Bible, Jesus is seen as the key to all Scripture:

See II Peter 1:12-21,

Acts 1:8; 2:32-33; 4:33; 5:32; 10:38-43

The life of Jesus was experienced by the disciples. Later, some of them wrote about the life and teachings of Jesus. Some of the original disciples were still alive to validate the early oral and written accounts of Jesus and the letters of Paul and others that make up the New Testament.

The disciples remembered and recorded how Jesus had used the Bible to explain his own mission and to give liberating and compassionate interpretations consistent with his view of God and the mission of his followers.

JESUS AT THE CENTER

Jesus placed himself at the center of his mission and message by repeatedly saying, "Follow ME". Even a casual reading of the

gospels shows that Jesus considered himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life" and that Jesus promised to liberate all who believed and followed "the truth".

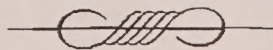
Colossians 1:17 claimed that "in Christ all things hold together". The role of Jesus Christ can be visualized in this way: Jesus is at the center of an hourglass. With Jesus at the center, I, as a Christian, cannot understand or interpret anything in the Old Testament without going through Jesus, my center. To bypass Jesus and leap backward into the Old Testament on my own is to guarantee misunderstanding and distortions of the Bible.

JESUS AS YOUR FAITHFUL GUIDE

1) As a Christian, how can you enlist the help of Jesus in understanding Bible passages outside of the Gospels?

2) Read the two books by Rev. Troy Perry, Founder of UFMCC: *The Lord Is My Shepherd, And He Knows I'm Gay*, published in 1972 and again in 1987 by Liberty Press, P.O. Box 50421, Austin Texas 78763, and *Don't Be Afraid Anymore*, published in 1990 by St. Martin's Press. These books tell the story of how Rev. Perry grappled with his own fears about being a Gay Christian and how he found freedom and joy in Christ.

3) Write out briefly your own personal answer to anyone who uses the Bible to attack and condemn you as a Lesbian or Gay Christian. Make a list of your main points.



Rev. Dr. Rembert S. Truluck,
Senior Pastor

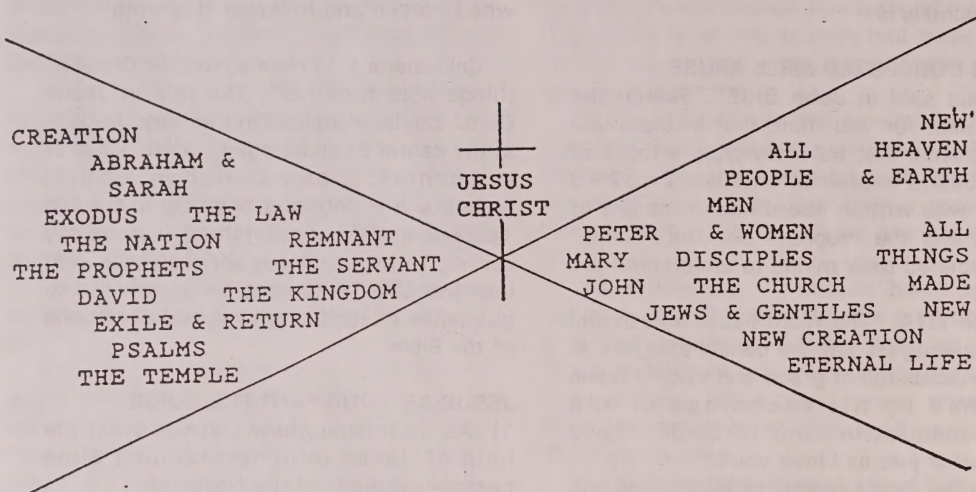
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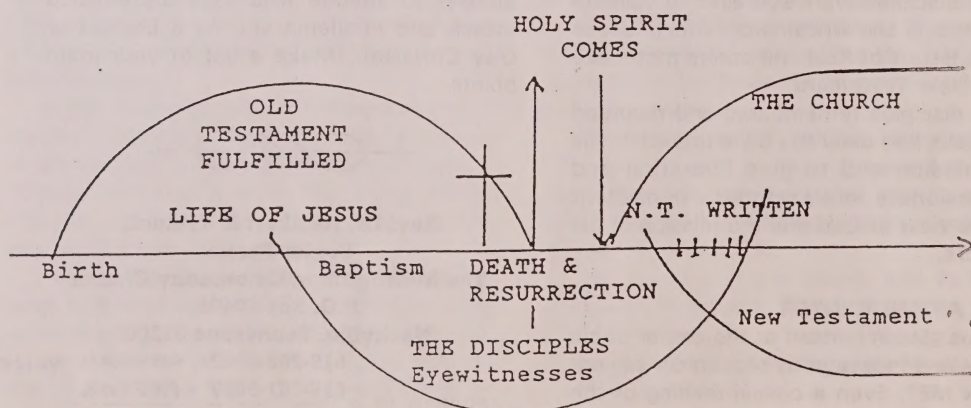
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STUDENT OF A THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



This diagram has helped me to remember that as a Christian I cannot understand or interpret anything in the Old Testament without going through Jesus. To bypass Jesus and leap backwards into the Old Testament on my own is to guarantee misunderstanding and distortions of the Bible.

In the Bible, Jesus is seen as the key to all Scripture.



See II Peter 1:12-21;
Acts 1:8; 2:32-33; 4:33; 5:32; 10:38-43.